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Jesse A. Grice



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Sheriff and Mayor

1852-1915

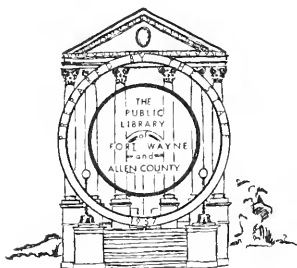


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One of a historical series, this pamphlet is published under the direction of the governing Boards of the Public Library of Fort Wayne and Allen County.

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FOREWORD

Jesse A. Grice, twenty-first mayor of Fort Wayne, served the Summit City as chief executive during the period 1910-1914. The following publication outlines his life and accomplishments. This pamphlet is the third of a series on Fort Wayne mayors.

The source materials were drawn from local newspaper files, Fort Wayne histories, and personal interviews with Harry G. Hogan, city attorney under Mayor Grice.

The Boards and the Staff of the Public Library of Fort Wayne and Allen County present this biographical sketch in the hope that the life and times of Mayor Grice will prove interesting and informative to both Fort Wayne's older and younger generations.

The life of Jesse A. Grice is a typical, American success story. While still a young boy he was indentured to a family to work in return for room and board. From obscure origins he rose by dogged determination, unfaltering courage, and shrewd ability to become a successful businessman. Allen County elected him sheriff; later Fort Wayne elected him mayor on the Republican ticket--most unusual in the days when Republicans were a minority in this area; the honors were a glowing testimonial to his great popularity.



EARLY YEARS



According to family tradition Grice's ancestors settled in Homeworth, Columbiana County, Ohio. His grandfather joined a westward-bound caravan of eighteen wagons in the Gold Rush of 1849. All disappeared without a trace.

Anthony Grice, Jesse's father, was born and spent his boyhood in Homeworth. After his marriage to Susanna Yeager, the daughter of a pioneer family in Henry County, he lived in Homeworth. Here a son, christened Jesse, was born to the couple on November 26, 1852. (Another source gives his birthplace as Georgetown, Brown County, Ohio.) Misfortune soon beset the family, for Anthony Grice died while Jesse was an infant. Later, Susanna Grice married Emanuel Detrich. The family then moved to Maysville (now Harlan), Indiana. By her second marriage, Jesse's mother had two daughters, Alberta and Belle.

For a number of years the family lived in Maysville, where Jesse attended grammar school. Poverty kept him from completing public school. Despite meager formal education, he learned from observation of men and from experience. He was accustomed to say, "I got my education in the school of hard knocks." It was literally true. He spent his early youth in hard and unremitting toil. At the age of nine years, he began to support himself. Thereafter he depended almost entirely on his own resources.

After working at various jobs he became a butcher and livestock dealer. In his teens he won the admiration

and confidence of his fellow townsmen, for the people of Maysville raised funds to buy him a horse and cattle wagon. Thereafter, in competition with experienced dealers, he always secured his share of business. At sixteen he was prospering in his own business.

Within three years, Jesse was sufficiently established to ask Angelia Stopher to marry him. She accepted his proposal, and the young couple were married in Maysville on September 22, 1871. The marriage was happy but short-lived; unfortunately, Mrs. Grice died two years later. The couple had one child, John Grice.

After the death of his wife, Jesse moved to Hicksville, Ohio, where he bought a meat market; he managed it in connection with his trade of stock buying. On November 25, 1874, he married Dora B. Hall, a resident of Ohio who had been born and reared a Hoosier. Two sons were born of the union--Wallace, who died at the age of eighteen months, and Vernon.

In 1878, after four prosperous years in Hicksville, Grice and his family returned to Maysville, where he purchased a farm near that village. Here they lived for fourteen years. During this Jesse successfully engaged in stock trading.

In 1892 he moved to Fort Wayne. He bought a meat market on the southwest corner of Barr and Wayne streets. His energy, good management, and reliability won the esteem and confidence of his customers. In 1898 he sold his butcher shop and formed a partnership with Alex Lawrence to deal in livestock. The two men became the leading stock buyers of this community. In 1904, after a six-year partnership, they dissolved the business to enable Jesse to enter politics.

ENTERING POLITICS

For years Grice had taken a lively interest in political questions and issues. A devotee of Republican principles and policies, he early became a zealous party worker. In recognition of his faithful service, his party nominated him



He met the voters face to face

for sheriff in 1904.

Grice waged a vigorous campaign. He visited communities throughout Allen County, including those known to be traditionally and solidly Democratic. His recognized honesty and probity, his reputation for fair dealing, his personal magnetism, and his well-known charity won him many votes. The tabulation of the election returns revealed that he had won the contest by a gratifying majority.

Two years later, Mr. Grice broke all precedents. Although he faced the strongest opposition, the people of Allen County re-elected him to the office of sheriff. No one had ever before accomplished this feat in Allen County. More significant, his re-election took place in the year of a Democratic sweep; only two other Republicans attained office that year--one by a majority of 23 votes, the other by 193 votes. Mr. Grice, however, was elected by a majority of 1,757--clear evidence of his popularity and of appreciation of the uprightness and justice with which he had conducted his office.

MAYORALTY ELECTION OF 1909

After his second term Grice retired from public office and on January 1, 1909, again resumed business. His return to private life, however, was short-lived. Because of his popularity with all classes of people, party leaders persuaded him to run for mayor on the Republican ticket that fall. His nomination, though contested, was a walk-away.

In a whirlwind campaign, marked by bitterness and personalities, he disclosed remarkable abilities as a vote getter. He lacked oratorical talents but displayed on the stump a faculty for speaking blunt, plain common sense, which the average citizen could understand. People invariably crowded his meetings to overflowing. He met the voters face to face, appeared at meetings everywhere in the city, and freely mingled with the people. His Democratic opponent, August M. Schmidt, a college graduate, throughout the campaign tried to make capital out of Grice's lack of formal education. Schmidt contended that no one could

properly serve Fort Wayne as mayor unless he had a college diploma. He once asked Grice, "What would you do if the President of the United States should come to Fort Wayne? How would you, a man without formal education, be able to introduce him?" With rare humor Mr. Grice replied, "Why, I would put him in a halter, lead him to the platform and say, 'Ladies and Gentlemen, the President of the United States.'"

Mr. Grice ran primarily on a reform platform and maintained that the time had come to change parties and clean out the City Hall from cellar to attic. He also stood for the preservation and development of the city's physical resources. On this platform, the businessmen and the corporations supported Mr. Grice. As a group, he claimed, the brewers, saloonkeepers, and policemen did not support him.

On November 2, 1909, the voters elected Jesse Grice the fourth Republican mayor of Fort Wayne. The preceding Republican mayors were Henry Sharp, Daniel L. Harding, and Chauncey B. Oakley. Grice received 7,440 votes--842 more than his opponent, Mr. Schmidt. The wave of Grice's popularity grew in volume as it progressed and swept practically the entire Republican ticket into office. The FORT WAYNE NEWS on November 4, 1909, published a political cartoon which showed Jesse Grice receiving a diploma inscribed with large letters, ELECTION.

CAREER AS MAYOR

Mr. Grice took the oath of office on January 1, 1910. The FORT WAYNE NEWS of September 17, 1915, gave the following account of him as mayor:

Every day he was at his desk or out on public enterprises giving them personal supervision that never waned until they were finally completed. His tremendous nervous energy kept his entire administration keyed up to a high pitch and imbued his several boards with unbounded enthusiasm that resulted in this community's enjoying a period of public activity unparalleled in its history.

Early in his administration Mayor Grice and the Board of Public Works began a street-paving program. The city paved thirty additional miles of streets with brick and built fifty-three miles of sidewalks. Much of the street pavement still serves as a base for the asphalt surface. The pavement laid on Calhoun Street and Spy Run Avenue during Grice's term ranked with the best contemporary city street paving in the Middle West.

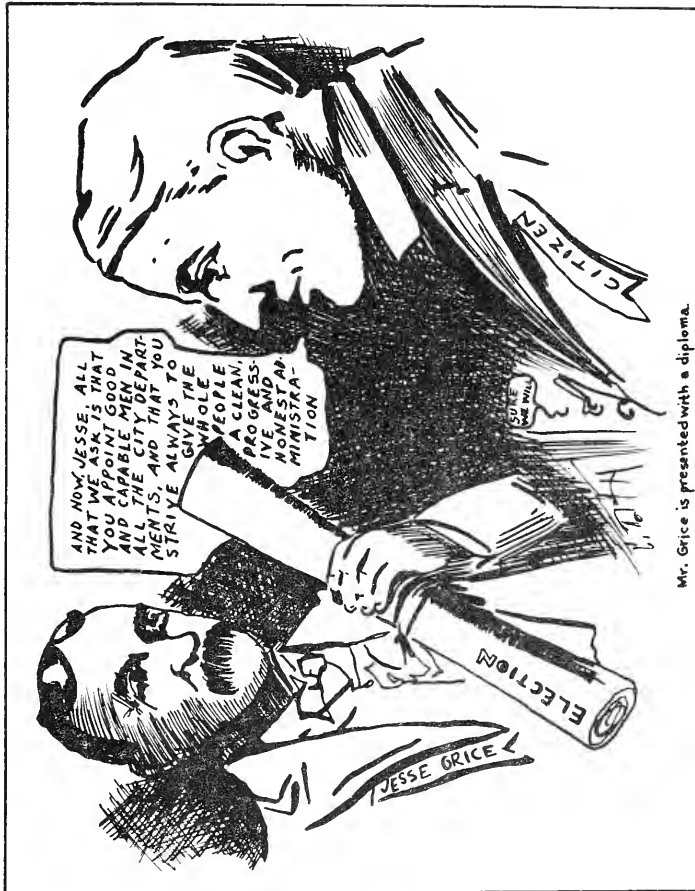
The administration also planned an ornamental street lighting system. Accordingly, the Western Gas and Construction Company installed lampposts on Calhoun Street south to Creighton Avenue, on Harrison Street from Superior Street to the Pennsylvania Railroad Station, and on the streets in the area bounded by Superior, Clinton, Jefferson, and Harrison streets.

In his annual message to the City Council in 1913, Mayor Grice said:

Calhoun Street should not be considered as the only main street of a prosperous, growing city, but the use of other downtown streets for general business purposes should be encouraged. To this end a plan has been adopted and is now being carried out whereby ornamental lamps are being installed along the streets. It will encourage merchants to locate and purchasers to frequent the well-lighted streets out of the high-rent district, hastening what is becoming a matter of necessity, a city of more than one "main" street.

It has been said, "Cities, like human beings, are judged by impressions." The fleeting glimpse of a town caught from the windows of a railway train that stops for a few minutes at a station leaves an indelible impression upon the traveler. If he sees nothing but forbidding gloom, punctuated by an occasional flickering gas lamp, he inevitably sets down that community as a third-rate municipality. If he catches a glimpse of a main street ablaze with light, he knows that here business thrives. Gloom means dirt, squalor, stagnation; light means activity, industry, life. From the lighting of a city its character can invariably be deduced.

A BACCALAUREATE SERMON



Mr. Grice is presented with a diploma.

The new ornamental lighting system advertised Fort Wayne, for street light posts were then uncommon. The lighting system brought hundreds of new customers to the city light plant.

At this time, city beautification became a topic of general interest. The city engaged a landscape architect; he toured the community and made suggestions for improving its aesthetic appearance. In April, 1912, the city government created a Department of Forestry and appointed Carl J. Getz, a graduate of Purdue University, city forester. Functions of the department included conservation of trees in parks and on city streets and instruction of citizens in tree culture. Improvement in city sanitation also made Fort Wayne a better place in which to live.

The growth of Fort Wayne's park system also received a tremendous impetus. The efforts of the Grice administration influenced the Indiana General Assembly of 1911 to enact a bill which provided park legislation for Fort Wayne similar to that which had already benefited Indianapolis. Under this law the Board of Park Commissioners of Fort Wayne possessed authority to establish boulevards, parks, parkways, pleasure drives, and playgrounds. The Board could now levy a tax (for the acquisition and improvement of park lands) against the adjoining property but not in excess of fifteen per cent of the assessed valuation of the land.

The Board of Park Commissioners enlarged Lake-side Park in 1912 by a \$2,800 purchase and a gift of three entire squares. The city bought Camp Allen Park, and the respective owners donated the John H. Vesey Park, Pontiac Place Park, and Hiron's Park. In the same year David N. and Samuel M. Foster deeded to the city a beautiful tract of sixty-four acres of wooded land bordering the St. Mary's River, today known as Foster Park. The formal dedication took place in July with a ceremony of speechmaking and music. In 1912 the city spent \$17,500 to improve the park lands it had received.

Other municipal departments made innovations and improvements. The Water Department installed a system of metering. The capacity of Pumping Station No. 3 was

nearly tripled. The Police Department acquired police wagons and other necessary equipment. The office of City Sealer was established.

During Grice's administration City Attorney Harry G. Hogan and the Pennsylvania and Wabash railroads completed the negotiations for track elevation begun by the previous Hosey administration. Thereupon, the railroads elevated the tracks over Calhoun Street, Fairfield Avenue, and Broadway. The administration also began negotiations to open Osage Street across the Nickel Plate Railroad and extend Harrison Street across the Lake Shore and Michigan Southern Railroad.



THE FLOOD OF 1913



Near the end of March, 1913, heavy rainfall drenched the Fort Wayne area. A total of 4.75 inches of rain fell between 7:25 a. m. , March 23, and 9:45 p. m. , March 25. The Maumee River, which stood at 6.7 feet on March 23, measured 19.6 feet on the morning of the 24th. The crest came at 11:00 p. m. , March 26, when the government gage at the bridge on Columbia Street registered the all-time high of 26.1 feet.

Flood waters covered the Nebraska, Bloomingdale, and Spy Run areas. Owing to the tremendous pressure of the water, two breaks appeared in the dike along St. Joe Boulevard. The large residential section of Lakeside became inundated so quickly that many people only escaped from their homes with difficulty. Others were marooned on roofs and in the second stories of their homes. Water filled at least two thousand homes; for about a week some fifteen thousand people were homeless. Fort Wayne experienced the most disastrous flood in its history.

The flood wrought enormous property damage and caused the loss of six lives. When the officials of the Allen County Orphans' Home realized that the swollen waters of the St. Mary's River threatened the safety of the children, they attempted to transport their wards elsewhere. Unfortunately, a boat, loaded with several children, capsized

while being rowed to shore; four young girls were drowned. A man who helped to rescue families penned in by the flood was drowned at the Main Street bridge. The sixth person died of a heart attack. A distress call to Chicago brought Captain Wallace and a crew from the government Lifesaving Service. They brought the rest of the children to safety.

Mayor Grice and his administration swung into action immediately. Their promptitude mitigated to some extent the seriousness of the situation. The city organized an association to co-ordinate relief for flood victims by centering it in one agency and dispensing aid from a central point. Officers were Mayor Jesse A. Grice; City Attorney Harry G. Hogan; Harry Kauffman, secretary; and City Comptroller William S. Cutshall, treasurer.

On Wednesday, March 26, 1913, Mayor Grice published the following proclamation in the FORT WAYNE JOURNAL-GAZETTE:

The flood situation has become extremely serious, and the entire water pumping facilities of the city have been put out of commission by the high water. It may be forty-eight hours or longer before the water recedes sufficiently to permit their being put in operation; consequently, the city will be unable to furnish any water, and the consumers will have to use rain water. Consumers are urged to boil the water before using it. The valve in the reservoir has been turned off and will not be turned on except in case of fire.

All persons who have been driven from their homes and have no place of shelter are requested to come to the City Hall, where arrangements will be made to secure housing for them.

The Police and Fire departments are doing good work in rescuing people who have been shut in their homes and helping them to reach dry land. To assist in this work of rescuing, the police seized twenty boats from Mr. Gunkle; and they sent for and received two carloads of boats from Rome City, which are being used in the flood district.

Owing to the equipment of the city power plant being under water, the citizens will not be able to secure city cur-

rent for a day or so. At the end of that time, it may be asserted positively that service will be resumed. . . .

The controller will request the City Council to make an appropriation of \$5,000 to the high-water emergency fund for the purpose of carrying on the necessary extra expenses and providing shelter and food for the sufferers.

Weatherman Palmer has stated that he expects the flood to reach its highest at nine o'clock tonight. After that time it is expected that the water will recede; the important thing that will then remain to be done is to take care of our afflicted people, to set in operation the water supply of the city, and to take strict measures to guard against typhoid fever and other diseases that might follow in the wake of the high waters. To this end I have instructed the Board of Health to spare no expense and to call upon the entire medical fraternity of the city to assist those in authority in suggesting ways and fixing plans of sanitation.

As to the rumored fears about the reservoir breaking at St. Mary's, Ohio, word was received that no danger was apprehended, and instructions have been made to keep the city authorities in constant touch with the situation there. Upon very reliable authority, I am informed that even if this reservoir should give way it will not materially alter the situation in our city.

In conclusion, I ask every good citizen to help us in this civic disaster and to do all in his power to prevent the spread of disease and sickness. I trust with everyone pulling together we will be safe and free from all direct and consequential dangers.

The city administration undertook practical measures to meet the emergency. The relief committee sent boats into the inundated areas to rescue people from second-story windows and housetops. Homeless families were lodged wherever possible. Churches and lodges set up folding beds and provided cooking facilities in their halls. Many families in private homes made guest rooms available. The furniture dealers equipped the Princess Rink with cots. Foster Furniture Company, Fort Wayne Outfitters, Fox Brothers &

Company, and Indiana Furniture Company placed the top floors of their buildings at the disposal of the authorities; they also supplied beds and bedding. Dispossessed persons thronged hotels and rooming houses. After making the necessary adjustments, the Wabash Valley Traction Company furnished current to light the downtown streets.

Fund-raising campaigns provided resources which eased hardships somewhat for the homeless victims. In addition to the \$5,000 which the City Council appropriated for relief, the FORT WAYNE JOURNAL-GAZETTE turned over its subscription fund, the traction company contributed \$1,000, the Berghoff Brewing Company donated \$500, the Indiana Lighting Company gave \$500, and the Home Telephone Company gave \$100. Charitable organizations referred all applications for aid to the city relief association which provided food, clothing, shelter, and medical assistance. A total of 11,187 persons received assistance. This was a rather large proportion for that day out of a total population of 71,472.

Though the water supply was shut off for several days, the situation could have become much worse if the Mayor had not promptly taken steps to protect the water works. He ordered a cofferdam built around the entire building of Pumping Station No. 1 to keep off the flood water. About four feet of water flooded the plant before the dam could be built. The Mayor ordered two engines from the Fire Department to be installed immediately to pump the water from the interior of the station. When the water fell to a depth of two feet, the engineers started fires under the boilers, generated steam, and began operating the pumps. The pumps at this station had a daily capacity of three million gallons--slightly less than the average daily consumption. Since the city restored the water supply in a relatively short time, the danger of disease due to inadequate sewage disposal was minimized.

By evening of March 26, Mayor Grice issued another statement reassuring the citizens of Fort Wayne. The FORT WAYNE NEWS-SENTINEL of that date quoted the chief executive as follows:

The water in the pumping station has been lowered several inches, and at this rate, if nothing happens, fire can be started under one of the boilers in eight or ten hours.

Just as soon as steam can be generated at No. 1 station, the municipal lighting plant will be in a position to resume operation, and lights will be supplied to the business houses and residence districts. By an arrangement with the Wabash Valley Traction Company . . . the streets north of the railroad and between Clinton and Harrison streets will be lighted. Whether our street light system can be put in operation at the same time depends upon the condition of the sub-transformers and other equipment that has been submerged in the water. In the meantime, all business houses in the outlying districts and citizens having porch lights can help out the street lighting by turning them on and leaving them lighted all night.

While the situation is grave, Fort Wayne citizens should not be unduly alarmed and should feel extremely grateful considering the great distress and loss of life that is being inflicted upon the neighboring cities and towns.

The Mayor declared martial law almost immediately and kept it in effect until the end of the emergency. The Mayor seized a railroad car loaded with meat, which was in transit from Chicago, and kept it to prevent distress. However, the meat was not needed, and the car was later sent on its way. Guards with orders to shoot anyone who disobeyed a command to halt patrolled the flooded districts in boats. Since many doors in flooded houses had been left open to let the water run out, strict measures were necessary to protect property from looters. No one was permitted to visit his home in the flooded area without a permit from Chief of Police Dayton R. Abbott. The Mayor also issued a proclamation asking that all instances of overcharging for food, bedding, medicine, and other necessities be reported to the City Hall. Offenders were promptly prosecuted. During the crisis the Mayor issued additional statements regarding the dangers of the moment and the measures taken to mitigate the suffering of the flood victims.

RETIREMENT

Mayor Grice retired from office January 5, 1914, standing high in the public esteem, both as a citizen and as a public servant. Just before the close of his term, he was guest of honor at a testimonial banquet at the Anthony Hotel attended by several hundred citizens.

Later serious weaknesses of his administration came to light. The city government had failed to determine and pay the city's portion of the elevation work at Calhoun Street, Broadway, and Fairfield Avenue. The Street Paving Department had overdrawn its account by \$8,712.26. A fire insurance contract on the fireproof market house for \$10,000 had been renewed. No plans or specific steps for flood prevention had been made. Worst of all, a sad scandal existed in the Police Department.

Commenting on this record, which he detailed in a speech in the Ninth Ward on September 2, 1921, William J. Hosey added,

Former Mayor Grice was very unfortunate because the greatest police scandal ever known in the history of the City of Fort Wayne developed under his administration. I believe Mayor Grice was the victim of the men who surrounded him.

Upon leaving office, Mr. Grice purchased a large farm near Leo; he intended to dispose of his beautiful home at 1016 Ewing Street and reside on his farm.

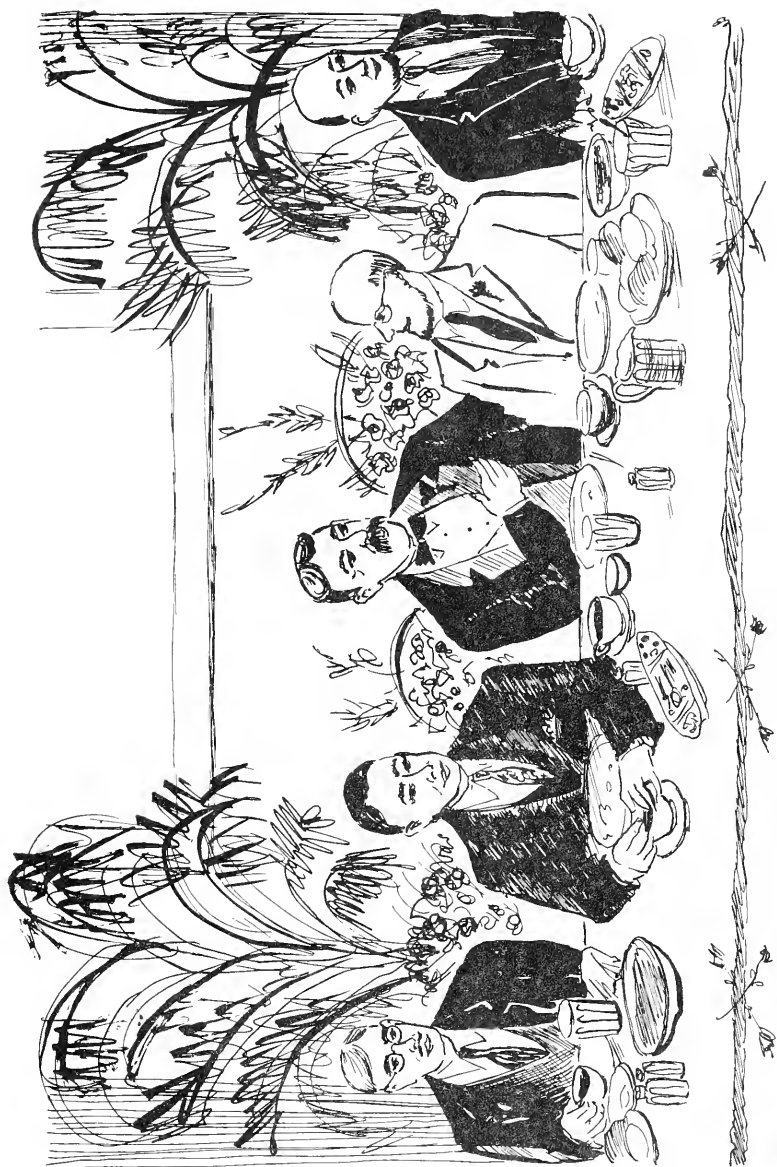


DEATH AND FUNERAL



For several years he had suffered from a stomach ailment. Injuries sustained in a fall down stairs at his home aggravated his condition. Until he became bedfast on September 3, 1915, few of his friends realized that he was ill, so successfully had he concealed his suffering.

On September 10, Mr. Grice's illness became critical. After consultation, his physicians removed him to St.



Mayor Grice was guest of honor . . .

Joseph Hospital, but because of his condition the attending surgeon, Dr. Maurice I. Rosenthal, refused to perform an operation. On September 14, a day after Grice had entered the hospital, Dr. Rosenthal permitted him to return home. Mr. Grice spent these last days calmly discussing business and domestic affairs with his family and associates. He did not complain but retained the same cheery smile and warm handclasp that had won him many friends. His consideration for the feelings of others, his kindly interest in their pleasures, and his deep sympathy in the sorrows of those about him continued unchanged.

The frequent bulletins issued by the physicians indicated that he was slowly sinking. On Friday, September 17, 1915, the doctors informed the family that the end was near. With his loved ones at his bedside the former chief executive passed away quietly at his home shortly after noon.

The FORT WAYNE NEWS of September 17, 1915, listed the following survivors: the widow; the sons, John, who conducted a meat market on East Creighton Avenue, and Vernon; two grandchildren, Dorothy B. and Jesse Grice; and two half-sisters, Mrs. Alberta McLaughlin of Lisbon, Ohio, and Mrs. Belle Wallace of Alliance, Ohio.

The following day the City Hall was draped in mourning in honor of Jesse A. Grice. At a special meeting on Saturday evening, the City Council made arrangements to attend the funeral in a body and unanimously passed the following resolution:

The death of former Mayor Jesse A. Grice is an occurrence which saddens the hearts of our citizens. To have removed by death a valuable citizen who so gracefully adorned the office of mayor, will cause sorrow to a vast majority of our citizens, who learned, during his incumbency in office, to honor, love, and respect him. He was a good citizen and an upright, honest man. He was a fair, just, and progressive mayor, who appreciated the needs of our people and the rights of our citizens. He was loved and honored by our humble citizens, whose every little want was courteously and efficiently attended to by him as mayor; and he was re-

spected and honored by all who came in contact with him in the discharge of his official duties. He had a keen perception of the wants of the people and the necessities of the city. Municipal problems were by him at all times intelligently, successfully, and promptly met and solved. It is indeed a great loss to this city that we have lost his advice in matters of importance. He was a home-loving, affectionate, and faithful husband and father, his character being unimpeachable and one that endeared him to his friends innumerable.

Therefore, be it resolved by the City Council of the City of Fort Wayne that we express our deep sympathy with his wife and children, who have lost such a valuable, good, kind husband and father--his host of friends, who have lost a genial, kindly, and pleasant friend and associate, and the citizens of our city, who have lost an able, conscientious, honest, and impartial citizen, and that a copy of these resolutions be spread upon the records of this body and a copy tendered to his family.

The fraternal orders to which Mr. Grice belonged directed the funeral services, which took place on September 19, 1915. The Masons conducted the services at the Scottish Rite Cathedral, while the Odd Fellows and the Elks had charge of the graveside services.

The body lay in state at the residence the evening and the morning before the funeral services. Rev. Edwin Q. Laudeman of the First Evangelical Church conducted private services at the home for the family. The funeral then proceeded to the City Hall, where a delegation, which included officers of the current city government and of Grice's administration, joined the procession. A cordon of police stood at attention along the east side of Barr Street at the City Hall while the cortege was passing. Members of the Grice Park Board and Board of Safety and the officers of the Elks occupied carriages in the procession. Floral offerings filled one carriage. Bells tolled as the cortege moved through the streets, where thousands stood with bared heads, to the Scottish Rite Cathedral.

Crowds thronged the Cathedral an hour before the

funeral. Special sections were reserved for those who accompanied the body from the residence to the Cathedral. Rev. Arthur J. Folsom of Plymouth Congregational Church preached the funeral sermon. After the obsequies, the remains were removed to Lindenwood Cemetery where the Odd Fellows and the Elks conducted the graveside ceremonies before the ex-mayor was laid to rest.

The FORT WAYNE NEWS of September 20 reported:

Men from every walk of life, businessmen, professional men, and laborers alike gathered to pay their final respects to the memory of the former chief executive. No more eloquent testimonial as to the high regard in which Jesse Grice was held could have been uttered than the attendance of this great concourse at the last rites for the departed.

Jesse Grice was known and respected for his unfeigned cheerfulness and kindness. Having known poverty and deprivation in his youth, he was always ready to respond to the cry of the needy and distressed. How many men, women, and children he helped in time of need will never be known. With a smile, a warm handclasp, and an encouraging pat on the back, he dismissed each recipient of his bounty. The matter was then put out of his mind. That others did not soon forget was evidenced by the support he received in his political campaigns and by the large attendance at his funeral.



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